



Election Modernization Committee

Date: **September 30, 2020**

Time: **7:30-9:30pm**

Location: **Conducted by Remote Participation**

Minutes

Members in attendance: Adam Badik, Juliana Brazile, Joseph Curro, Greg Dennis, Walter Horn, William Logan, James O'Connor, Maxwell Palmer, Paul Parravano, Juhan Sonin, Jennifer Susse, Lesley Waxman

Guests in attendance: Len Diggins, Patrick Hanlon

1. Executive Order on Remote Participation

Jim confirmed we were all familiar with the terms of the Governor's executive order on remote participation.

2. Introduction of our new Town Clerk, Juliana Brazile

Juli introduced herself to the group.

3. Plans for November Presidential Election

Juli said that printed ballots arrived at the clerk's office today, and about 17-18,000 would be mailed out to voters over the next few weeks. Her office has a goal to mail them all out by October 15th. She informed us that the deadline for mail-in ballots has been extended to three days after Election Day, 5pm on Friday, November 6th. October 24th is the last day to register to vote. Early voting will be available for about 2 weeks, October 17-30.

The front plaza of Town Hall is currently under construction, so early voters will be directed to enter through the parking lot. Voters are directed along a one-way path, so that they may access the early voting area while maintaining social distancing.

Due to the anticipated increase in mail-in ballots, the state is permitting clerk's offices to scan early-arriving ballots before election day. The clerk's office has acquired a high-speed tabulator to scan them centrally. No count may be performed, but they may be scanned. This avoids transporting a large number of ballots to the precinct on election day.

Unofficial results will be posted online on election night. The ballots that arrive November 4-6 will be tallied, perhaps by hand, on either November 10 or 12. Official results will be certified on November 18.

Greg: Why would ballots arriving Nov 4-6 be tallied by hand and not scanned?

Juli: We're waiting on instructions from the state, but not clear whether scanning them will be permitted or why it would not be.

Jim: How does the scanner know in which precinct each ballot belongs to?

Juli: The precinct can be configured through the software and only a single precinct is processed at a time.

Adam: Was the drop box in front of Town Hall moved to avoid the construction?

Juli: It was moved 20ft to the right. The location is shown on the town webpage.

Greg: Is the deadline for overseas mail-in ballots still 10 days after election day?

Juli: Yes.

Greg: What percentage of overseas ballots are emailed vs mailed nowadays?

Juli: About 99% are emailed today. Only a few arrive by regular mail.

Joe: Do mail-in ballots that arrive between November 3rd and 6th still need to be postmarked by November 3rd?

Juli: Yes

Paul: Is the ability to email a ballot only available to overseas voters?

Juli: Yes

Juhan: We should think about ways to allow more people to vote from home, perhaps in a non-binding way to start.

Greg: Were any changes to the AutoMARK ballot marking devices necessary to accommodate the new voting machines from LHS?

Juli: No

Paul: As someone who is fully blind, he has a high appreciation for the AutoMARK machines.

4. Review and Comment on recent Local and State Primary Elections

Adam: Some ballots were sent to the wrong precinct for the primary. How are we going to avoid that mistake in the future?

Juli: There were volunteers helping to mail out the very large number of requested ballots. It appears that some volunteers may have grabbed ballots from an adjacent table without realizing they were intended for a different precinct. Going forward, the ballots will be segregated by room to reduce this and volunteers will be better trained. We also think the printer may have placed ballots in the wrong boxes.

Walter: Is the outer white envelope needed?

Juli: No, but we encourage people to use it anyway. The only envelope that's absolutely necessary is the yellow one.

Patrick: Approximately how many ballots were rejected?

Juli: A very small number. They would be rejected if they are not signed. If they arrive early enough, we'll mail it back to the voter. There were some cases of non-Arlington voters dropping ballots in Arlington drop boxes. Those were mailed to the municipality they were intended for.

Greg: If a ballot is rejected, will the Secretary of State's ballot-tracking website indicate, so the voter can seek out a new ballot or show up to vote on election day?

Juli: Yes

Jennifer: I heard there were police accompanying drop box pickups in the past. Is that something we'll be doing again?

Juli: No, Juli and Janice pick up ballots from the drop boxes personally with no police escort. Janice asked for police accompaniment during the town election, because she was on the ballot and felt awkward about picking them up by herself.

Len: Do we know if any Arlington ballots deposited in other towns drop boxes and then mailed to us?

Juli: Not aware if or how many; receipt of that mail would be handled by her staff.

5. EMC Warrant Articles 21, 23 & 24 Update

Jennifer motioned that Article 21, which extends the life of the committee until 2022, be put before Town Meeting as previously drafted; and further that we have no objection if the moderator wishes it to be part of the consent agenda. Juhan seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Greg reported that there was a request from Town Counsel and others that the agenda for the online Town Meeting in November be limited, with nonessential articles delayed until spring. According to Town Counsel, there are concerns about the online Town Meeting platform and whether it will smoothly allow everyone to participate in a full way. Given the legislative timetable, Town Counsel believes it is unlikely that a delay will result in any delay in approval of Articles 23 and 24, since the legislature is unlikely to take this up before the fall anyway.

In light of this, we discussed at length whether Articles 23, the consolidation of Town Meeting Member elections, and Article 24, Ranked Choice Voting, should be put before the November Town Meeting or delayed until spring.

Jennifer: We should consider delaying, because it's unlikely to delay the implementation of either and feels too close to the ranked choice voting statewide ballot campaign.

Walter: These articles are our major contributions, and without them, we have little to show as a committee.

Joe Curro: The ballot question campaign for ranked choice voting may help ensure Town Meeting is educated about the warrant article.

Adam Badik: We'll have new people on the committee for the Spring, and I don't want to restart the process and vote on everything again.

Juhan: We shouldn't delay any more than necessary.

Walter: Not confident about the legislature voting on these in a timely way and wouldn't want to delay more than necessary.

Lesley: Thinks we should keep the motion on ranked choice voting, to keep it close to the ballot question campaign, but delay the town meeting election consolidation, because it can't be accomplished in time for the Spring election anyway.

Lesley made a motion to postpone Article 23 until the Spring. Greg seconded. We each voted to either continue to put the motion, as currently drafted, before Town Meeting, or to postpone. The vote was 4 continue - 1 postpone - 1 abstention.

Lesley made a motion to put Article 24 before Town Meeting as currently drafted. Juhan seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Bill reported that the Board of Registers took a vote on the ranked choice voting, and the result was 2-2, with both Democrats in favor and both Republicans opposed.

6. Public Comment and or Questions

None

7. New Business

Walter would like there to be more information about the ballot questions, and he wondered whether we or the town could put together a forum of some kind. Others shared a similar sentiment about lack of information, but felt that hosting such a forum was determined to be out of scope for the committee. The League of Women Voters often puts together events and information like that.

Juhan asked whether we are going to revisit 16-17 year olds voting in town elections. The survey showed that currently more Arlington residents are opposed than in favor, so it's unlikely that we can move forward on that in the short term.

Greg asked whether we want to put together a committee report for this town meeting. There was consensus that we should, so Greg will draft one before the next meeting for review.

We decided our next meeting would be held on Thursday, October 28th at 7:30pm.

9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:33pm.